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Contact: Sandy Cooney
916-653-9402

Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Plan Released

Secretary for Resources Mike Chrisman Sends \$8.9 Billion Salton Sea Recovery Plan to the Legislature, Launches Historic 75-Year Vision for California's Largest Lake

Sacramento- Secretary for Resources Mike Chrisman today delivered the Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Preferred Alternative to the Legislature, an historic strategy to revitalize California's largest lake. The Preferred Alternative, required by law, is an \$8.9 billion recovery plan that sets in motion a 75-year vision for Salton Sea restoration. Release of the document, nearly three years in the making, followed the work of a 32-member stakeholder advisory panel that represented diverse interests across the state and in and around the Salton Sea region.

"The Preferred Alternative I've sent to the Legislature today represents a starting point for Salton Sea restoration that is adaptable, flexible, sustainable, and functions under a wide variety of conditions that may arise over the course of the next 75 years," Chrisman said. "The vision we are articulating today that includes broad agreement on early start habitat activity and a five year action plan, provides a sound starting point from which restoration of this important ecosystem can begin."

The release of the Preferred Alternative is the culmination of dozens of workshops, public meetings and nearly three years of intensive scientific study. The Preferred Alternative includes agricultural, recreational and economic issues with the flexibility to address changing conditions at the sea. The aim is to improve air quality, water quality, habitat and the overall ecosystem of the Salton Sea.

"Developing the Preferred Alternative has been an open and inclusive process and it has engaged a vast number of stakeholders and the public," Chrisman said. "This process was designed to bring all interested groups together in order to work collectively toward restoring this ecologically significant body of water. While we may not all agree today on every aspect of this plan, it does not preclude any idea from being part of an eventual Salton Sea restoration along this 75-year road," he added.

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1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311, Sacramento, CA 95814 Ph. 916.653.5656 Fax 916.653.8102 <http://resources.ca.gov>



Preferred Alternative 2

The release today of the Preferred Alternative follows two months of additional input from stakeholders following Secretary Chrisman's March 27 release of a Draft Preferred Alternative.

"We wanted to do everything we could within reason, both from a scientific base and fiscally responsible perspective, to incorporate the interests of the stakeholders," Chrisman said. "Not everyone was going to get everything they wanted, but all the groups involved have gained a significant stake in this process so we may continue forward in our shared vision to save the sea."

The process to restore the Salton Sea began in 2003 with the Quantification Settlement Agreement to reduce southern California's dependence on Colorado River water. Under the terms of the agreement, inflows to the Salton Sea will be reduced, hastening its ecological degradation. To mitigate these effects, state legislation established a Salton Sea Advisory Committee to help guide the secretary for resources in developing the best restoration and mitigation plan possible in a process that will run until 2078.

The Salton Sea is located in Riverside and Imperial counties and is California's largest lake, 35 miles long and 15 miles wide. It was formed in 1905 after an accidental levee break from the Colorado River allowed water to fill a deep desert basin. Birds and other wildlife flourished in the newly formed habitat, and came to depend on it as other wetlands quickly disappeared. The sea has gradually become less hospitable as salts that flow into the basin and dissolve have no natural outlet. The sea is 30 percent more saline than the ocean, creating a hostile habitat for wildlife and very poor air and water quality.

For more information, refer to www.salttonsea.water.ca.gov.